



THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource – Employees

Call EAS: Olympia (360) 753-3260 Seattle (206) 720-3514 Spokane (509) 582-3686
Website: <http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

- Note: Since the terrorist attacks against our country on 9/11, EAS has offered various services for Washington State Employees and their families.



- Q. My employee frightened coworkers by "blowing up" over a small matter. I made an EAS referral and told him to enroll in anger management counseling. It's easy to see that this is the problem, so why can't I insist on it?

- Q. After many years, I have decided to confront my employee's attitude and work problems. Frankly, I'm losing the battle. He always has a defensive response to any confrontation. How do I make progress in dealing with this behavior?

If you believe that your staff is having trouble coping with the incidents of last month, call EAS to discuss the options you have to help them. EAS's services include providing handouts about trauma, group debriefings and individual appointments. You may want to refer individuals to EAS for personal assistance, or consider asking EAS for a group debriefing which can help your staff understand their normal, expected reactions to trauma. This can also help people understand why we all react differently, and why some people take more time than others, to cope. EAS is staffed with professionals trained to help in this type of event. Employees will be much more productive when they feel the support of management. They need help to work through the incident, not just "get over it."

A. Although it appears your employee could use help in learning how to manage anger, his anger outburst does not make this conclusive. There could be many explanations for the outburst you witnessed. Only some of these explanations may require intervention or professional help. Your demand that he obtain anger management counseling is beyond your role as a supervisor and is an example of armchair diagnosing of conduct problems. However, referring your employee to EAS because of his inappropriate anger response is appropriate. When supervisors direct employees to the type of help they think is needed for a personal problem, they risk problems getting worse even as they are provided evidence of their employee's cooperation. What if a hangover, depression, drug withdrawal, or chronic pain caused your employee's irritability? Anger management counseling alone may have little effect on such conditions.

A. The length of time associated with the problem behavior you describe contributes to the difficulty you experience in getting it to stop. Although some supervisors briefly seek guidance from EAS professionals before making a referral, ongoing consultative help from EAS may be necessary to help you remain focused and effective in what may be a long-term project to assist your employee. Many supervisors misunderstand the purpose of EAS, thinking they are services only for troubled employees. They forget that if they face conflict and supervision problems they are just as entitled to EAS services as any other employee with a personal problem. The EAS professional will not tell you what to do or take responsibility for your decisions, but will help you clarify your options, deal with ambivalence associated with conflict, and help you feel empowered to make effective decisions.

■ Q. Periodically, employees take leave for extended periods of time to help family members who have medical problems. We have not referred such employees to EAS, but should we consider doing so?

A. Taking leave solely to assist family members with health problems would not justify a supervisor referral, but reminding employees about EAS as a supportive resource would be a good idea. Let your employee know that the recommendation is meant to be helpful - employees who take time off for extended periods are often anxious about how they are perceived by others at work. Many health care problems are so demanding of the patient and family members that certain resources may be necessary to manage employee stress and the patient's healthcare delivery needs. EAS may help find resources, many unique, that assist employees in their caregiver responsibilities. Some of these services would not be easily discovered without this assistance.

■ Q. My employee wants to complain to my supervisor about a decision I made. Should I encourage him, talk him out of it, or what? How do I keep my credibility from being undermined if my supervisor reverses my decision?

A. Attempting to prevent your employee from speaking with your supervisor will likely compound your problem. You should speak to your supervisor ahead of time and provide an account of your employee's disagreement with your decision and his complaint. Ask that your supervisor first discuss the complaint with you after the meeting with your employee so that you have an opportunity to explain your decision. This is an important step in showing support for you, even if your supervisor reverses your decision later. Even if your decision was problematic and your supervisor is inclined to reverse it, request that you assume the responsibility of delivering this message to your employee. Avoid having your supervisor make the announcement in your absence. This will undermine your credibility. If your supervisor can't support your decision, at least you are in control of the message and have the option of switching your position based upon the merits of the argument.

NOTES:

Visit EAS on our website at:
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